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"WE WERE BETRAYED"

A Veteran of the Cuban Invasion Speaks Out

How do Cubans who fought at the Bay of Pigs feel about the U. S. role in that fiasco?

This is the story of one Cuban invader, told in his own words.

Manuel Penabaz tells of assurances made by representatives of the U. S. Government that the invasion against Castro would have U. S. support.

Then, he relates, just when the invaders needed help most—and might have won—they were told:

"We cannot give you any further support."

Many veterans of the invasion, just ransomed from Castro prisons, say they hold no rancor against the United States. But Penabaz says:

"We did not fail. We were betrayed."

CPYRGHT

by Manuel Penabaz

"Keep advancing! Keep advancing—and wait!"

So long as I live, I shall never forget those words. They sounded out from an American ship, from the officer who directed our landing operations at the Bay of Pigs on the coast of Cuba, where 1,500 of us Cubans offered our lives in the hope of liberating our beloved country from the rule of the bearded despot, Fidel Castro, on April 17, 1961.

"Keep advancing and firing! Take the area ahead—and wait!"

To us who had struggled ashore from our landing barges, the words "and wait" meant only one thing: "Help is on the way."

When we were recruited for this perilous mission, and during our exhaustive training in Guatemala—even while on the slow, ancient freighters that brought us from our embarkation port in Nicaragua—we were promised the support of the armed forces of the United States.

"Over you will be air cover," we were told, "and back of you the Navy and land forces of the United States and other free nations of the Americas. You cannot fail."

We did not fail. We were betrayed.

After three days of fighting, we heard again that same American voice that had exhorted us to "keep advancing—and wait." Only this time it said:

"We cannot give you any further support."

The whole invasion operation that had been planned and directed by agencies of the U. S. Government had been abandoned by that Government at the moment when victory could have overthrown Fidel Castro.

Of the 1,500 who began the assault at the Bay of Pigs on that warm April morning, about 100 were killed; 60 later died of wounds, starvation, torture and executions; most of the others were captured.

I was among the lucky. I escaped. Four of my comrades and I found a raft and, after five days afloat, were rescued.

Now my surviving comrades of that invasion also have been freed—ransomed from Castro's prison cells. Many of them have told me since their arrival in Miami that their lips are sealed because they have relatives still in Cuba. I, too, have relatives in Cuba. But my lips are not sealed. I will tell the story of what happened at the Bay of Pigs, be-

cause I believe that such a mistake must not be made again by any government or people of the free world.

For me, the story of the invasion began in Miami, Fla., when I heard the words: "Recruits are needed—recruits to overthrow Castro."

The Central Intelligence Agency of the U. S. Government, headed by Allen Dulles, was the recruiting and training group for our volunteers.

Several officers of the Central Intelligence Agency were operating in the Miami area, seeking out the leaders among the Cuban exiles and encouraging them to select the likeliest young men for the adventure. I was told that there would be an invasion of Cuba "fairly early in 1961," backed and supported by the United States.

The first airlifts of volunteers to training camps began in late summer, 1960. Any recruits who doubted that the United States was back of the operation were assured that, when we reached our training camps, we would find American officers in charge and there would be the best of American weapons to carry into battle.

Sure enough, when we arrived at Trax Base, high in the mountains of Guatemala, American officers were in charge of the camp, and our weapons were among the best the U. S. had to offer.

At Retalhuleu, Guatemala, a splendid airstrip had been laid down by American engineers. All about were huge accumulations of war material—aircraft, mortars, tons of bombs and other ammunition.

Over the whole operation, there was an air of great secrecy. Our instructors, American officers, wore only fatigue uniforms, with no markings. We knew them only by first names. But it was apparent that they were experienced and efficient.

It did not take us long to learn that "Frank," the man who gave the orders for both Americans and Cubans, was a colonel. The American subordinate officers were all experts in their fields. "Ray" was our rifle and pistol instructor. It leaked out that he was from California and a pistol champion. "Sam," chief trainer of the parachutists, was plainly a veteran of many combat jumps. "Nick," from New Mexico, was our instructor for intelligence operations. "Bob" demon-